


Street life

A new approach to tackling cocaine and heroin use from street level to international drugs barons has been piloted in four areas. Stephen Otter, deputy chief constable of Avon and Somerset Constabulary, writes about the Street Level Up Approach and how it can combat the tide of Class A drugs.

 Each year, it is estimated that 25 to 35 tonnes of heroin and 35 to 45 tonnes of cocaine are smuggled into the UK.

These drugs fuel a drugs market worth up to £7billion a year and the cost to our society in terms of drug-related crime, anti-social behaviour and health issues which can run to about £18billion a year.

Illegal drugs cause harm to communities in numerous ways - from open drug dealing on the streets, which creates a sense of fear and lawlessness - to drug misusers stealing and robbing to get the money for their next fix. When families break up, children can be enticed into a culture of gangs and violence. Finally the presence of illegal drugs draws public money away from regeneration and growth into treatment and enforcement.

This article sets out a new approach to tackling drugs from local, street level, in our communities, to drug dealers who cross force boundaries, referred to as level two crime, and those who operate higher up the chain, nationally and internationally.

The Street Level Up Approach, is being developed by the Government's Concerted Interagency Drugs Action group (CIDA) who are responsible for combating Class A drugs in the UK.

The approach is about connecting and coordinating law enforcement agencies to address the harm that drugs cause at street level as opposed to them



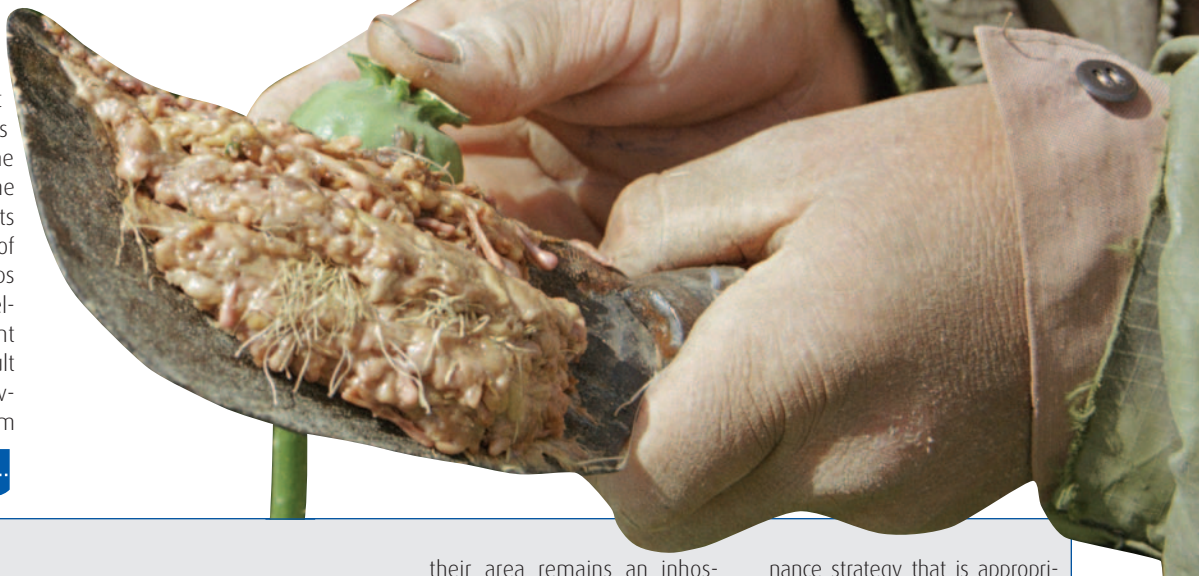
working separately against different levels of criminality. It brings together an unprecedented array of techniques and resources, many previously only available to deal with national and international criminality.

I have been involved in leading a project to test this idea in four pilot sites across England: Bristol, the London Borough of Camden, Coventry and Rochdale. The Drugs, Analysis and Research Programme at the Home Office has already conducted a thorough evaluation of the pilot and concluded that *'the Street Level Up Approach has been a highly positive, innovative intervention which has shown some potential benefits in nearly all areas. The major challenge for the future remains one of sustainability.'*

The Street Level Up Approach offers new opportunities for better and closer working, both within the former law enforcement agencies, including the National Criminal Intelligence Service and National Crime Squad, that will become the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and between SOCA and the police on a more local level.

The response to this challenge has been improving as the police service, the enforcement and intelligence agencies, local authorities and many other partners have learnt to work more closely together. The Street Level Up Approach offers real opportunities for harm reduction in communities.

The scheme is about focussing a wide range of the CIDA group's resources at a drugs problem from the street level up. In the past, agencies such as Customs and Excise, the National Crime Squad and the police often targeted their efforts at different levels and types of criminality. This meant that gaps were sometimes left in the intelligence and enforcement approach and that it was difficult to see how the higher-level activity contributed to reducing harm at street level.



The Street Level Up Approach:

The approach works along well-trying problem solving lines and can be summarised by the following model:



Intelligence

First, the problematic drugs market is identified and a baseline assessment completed with expert assistance from the National Criminal Intelligence Service. The intelligence picture is developed as far as possible from the street level up the supply chain, with any intelligence gaps identified. This activity is crucial in ensuring partner agencies have a clear view of the local drugs market and the logistical chains that feed it – it also helps to ensure that all agencies develop a clear and shared understanding of the nature of the problem. This phase is summarised in a diagram in the Appendix.

Intervention

CIDA assist in selecting resources from its intelligence and enforcement agencies. These resources are made available to a multi-agency team of experts,

led by a local police manager who has responsibility for the area of the drugs market. The multi-agency team will make sure that other partners such as the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the organisations that form Drug Action Teams and Crime and Disorder Partnerships are included. The CPS is informed in order to achieve consistency in the prosecution of offenders and the others in order to simultaneously reduce the demand side of the drugs market.

Maintenance

A successful outcome to the intervention phase would be the removal of dealers at the street level as well as the removal of key people further up the chain who were supplying them. In order to make the most of this breathing space however, the police will have to work closely with local partners to ensure

their area remains an inhospitable environment for drug dealers. For example, if the police have successfully closed a number of crack houses, they may want to work with the local authority to ensure that other families are moved in as quickly as possible to help the area stay 'clean'. If a real shortage of heroin and crack has been achieved, the police may want to work with DATs to ensure that as many problematic drug users enter treatment as possible. These are the kind of activities that will ensure any success achieved by the Street Level Up Approach (SLUA) will be sustainable beyond the life of the initial activity. It is therefore essential that the police working with local partners devise a maintenance strategy that is appropriate to the area concerned and the enforcement action taken.

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This approach offers a way of successfully bringing together the UK's intelligence and enforcement resources to tackle directly the harm caused by drugs at the street level. It provides an effective tactical option in the fight against drugs, an option where the effort can be clearly connected to reducing the harm that drugs cause on our streets. Of course, SLUA is only one of many tactical options that police forces and their partners have at their disposal. As always, the key is to identify the most appropriate and effective response to the local drugs problem.

Appendix

